

Youth and Memory: Understanding Participatory Culture in Contemporary Mandopop among China's Millennials

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Abstract: Mandopop, as a distinctive genre of Chinese popular music, has accomplished a flourishing scene within a few decades. A recent observation has demonstrated a phenomenon that reflects how China's millennial audience participates in media platforms to exhibit idiosyncrasies defined by their memory and experience, seeking for the individual participation in Mandopop. By making use of a qualitative research design based on phenomenology, the study reviewed the participatory culture in Mandopop among China's millennials from their perspectives. Ten participants were sampled through purposive sampling, and data was collected through semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The rationale was to investigate how China's millennials characterize and interpret their daily participation in experiencing Mandopop. The findings demonstrate that China's millennials deem Mandopop as an important, integral part of their lifetime and even in their youth and memory. It can offer an insight on how Mandopop fans establish their own position in order to find cultural identity and cultural memory in the mediatized context. The study concludes that participatory culture is an important theoretical domain to understand audience groups in popular music, and to build a media environment in which individuals can actively participate and share popular music content, rather than remaining passive consumers.

Keywords: Youth, Memory, Participatory Culture, Mandopop, China's millennials, Media, Popular Music

1. INTRODUCTION

Mandopop is recognized as a sub-genre of modern Chinese popular

music, whose popularity among China's millennials has expanded the music industry beyond borders. Mandopop traces its origin in the jazz-influenced Mandarin popular music of 1930s Shanghai, from where, through the effects of war and politics in Mainland China, it relocated to Hong Kong and spread to Taiwan in the 1970s (Chik, 2010). In 1980s, the Mandopop scene gradually developed a commercial mode which was accompanied by the maturity of the recording industry and the emergence of iconic pop artists. The prosperity of Mandopop continues to evolve and spread across different regions, in Greater China and in other Chinese-speaking communities. Taiwan had been the undisputed leader in the Mandopop industry, not least during the 2000s (Moskowitz, 2009). Songs sold by Taiwan's record labels have been appealing to audiences in Mainland China and other Chinese communities. Since the late 1980s, the normalcy in Mandopop songs is that some typical ballads employ an appealing and catchy melody coupled with rhymed and rhetorical lyrics to attract a larger crowd of Chinese audience. Mandopop is widely influential among the youth in Mainland China since 2000 (Groenewegen, 2011). Nevertheless, the millennial generation in China is the main demographic consumers of contemporary Mandopop. The pattern of experiencing Mandopop among China's millennials, who appear to seek out "retro music" in the media context (Hallegatte et al., 2018), is more individualistic. They not only consume Mandopop but also participate in the construction of its meaning (Zhang, 2021). In the current era, the development of technology has enabled the millennials to experience popular music with many immersive ways by using digital devices. A few millennials seek out music that resonates with their own experiences and emotions, while others appreciate lyrics that reflect their daily struggles, aspirations, and relationships. Mandopop artists who can authentically capture and express these sentiments tend to gain a strong following among millennials. Ho states that listening to music as a leisure activity is very popular among adolescents (Ho, 2015). Similarly, experiencing contemporary Mandopop was also a main source of entertainment for China's millennials because they have all been through adolescence. Social media and short video have become the main platforms for communicating and sharing songs (Dewan & Ramaprasad, 2014). Additionally, there are changes in popular music due to technological innovations such as the Internet, MP3, smartphones, and digital music (Bennett & Rogers, 2019). Any given genre of popular music can be found in a variety of mass media. Popular music as a culture inevitably exists in media, such that the media can be a virtual place of seeking for cultural memory (Prior, 2018). This study employs the

phenomenological method to explore the cultural memory in contemporary Mandopop among China's millennials under a mediatized context. Through in-depth interviews, the study aims to investigate how China's millennials characterize and interpret their participation in Mandopop. The results of the study demonstrate the individual participation in contemporary Mandopop is tied closely to culture and media.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Participatory Cultural Theory

Henry Jenkins, a scholar of culture and communication, proposed the theory of participatory culture to describe the phenomenon of interaction in media culture. In the analog media era, the initiative of fan groups was prominent among media audiences, and thus early studies of participatory culture were mainly based on the cultural interactions of fan circles (Jenkins, 2012). Over the decades, research participants also expanded from fan groups to a more general media audience, with greater emphasis on individualized and spontaneous behaviors of the public in creating, disseminating, and sharing media messages (Hodkinson, 2007; Wood & Skeggs, 2008). With the advent of the Internet era, the participatory culture came to be known as a new type of media culture that is free, equal, fair, inclusive, and shared, created by using the Web 2.0 network as a platform (Jenkins, 2018). Any Internet user can, through an identity, participate actively by creating media texts, disseminate media content, and strengthen online interactions. Participatory culture theory emphasizes the creation and sharing of textual content. It also considers the distribution of thoughts and information, which is relevant to research on participatory culture and media platforms. Participatory culture is gaining popularity because of the evolution of new forms of communication and advances in online technology (Valtysson, 2010). Pearson points out that the audience can act as both consumers and producers (Pearson, 2010), and that the content they produce can in some ways be regarded original works with a creative twist. From the perspective of participatory culture, this means that artistic and creative content can be shared on a network and can be subject to further online participation. In fact, online participation has become influential in how people collect, select, interpret, and communicate information (Carmen Garcia-Galera & Valdivia, 2014). Participatory culture theory, therefore, encourages and inspires the audience, as individuals, to create and share the content that they prefer.

2.2 Popular Music as a Phenomenon

While the commercialized popular music is constantly consumed and experienced by millennial audiences, it is important to investigate and reflect on its acceptability as popular music. Hence, from the perspective of philosophy, the term ‘phenomenon’ can be applied in this situation causing music to be experienced on the basis of reality. The term ‘phenomenon’ is academically relevant to things that can be explored and inquired, especially processes and events that are unusual or of unique importance. Hence, selecting popular music as a phenomenon refers to the analytical and understanding thinking of social and cultural phenomenon caused by popular music, including a comprehensive analysis of various music genres and styles, as well as discussions on the historical status and influence in the history of popular music. Kotarba clarified the social phenomenon employing the concept of popular music and emphasized the word ‘popular’ is in the sense to mean people (Kotarba, 2013). In addition, describing popular music as a phenomenon also refers to the related entertainment industry booming, intentionally to create the idols and a specific type of popular music becoming the mainstream in the era. Fairchild pointed out that the production of popular music was not simply integrated into the overall structure of the entertainment industry (Fairchild, 2007). It was particularly important to consider consumers and the market, and even to pay attention to the requirements and responses of global politics and economy. Like the ‘idol-making’ process is extremely complicated. Creators formulate effective propaganda strategies, skillfully use the psychology of the audience, and make full use of the media to shape the audience in a broad communication environment. Popular music has always been regarded by the research community as a cheap, superficial culture full of affectation and catharsis (Cook, 2018). However, popular music, as a well-received culture, enriches many aspects of people’s life, which cannot be ignored (Hesmondhalgh, 2014). This makes popular music as a mass culture rising in the 20th century. The mass culture here refers to a kind of patterned, mass production, no depth and copied culture based on industrial society, with urban mass as the consumption object and disseminated through mass media according to market rules (Hinduja, 2006). For example, rock music, as a genre of popular music, is considered to reflect and express the emotion and spirit of a specific group of people (Nie, 2021). It belongs to the music of a generation born and raised after World War II, mainly in the Western world. It can become a phenomenon which must be directly related to people’s degree of acceptance. In Asia, K-pop has also become a phenomenon disseminating around the world. Doré and Pugsley stated that as an important part of South Korea’s

entertainment industry (Doré & Pugsley, 2019), K-pop represents an upward state of politics, economy, culture, technology and business model. They emphasized that in the past 20 years, K-pop emerged as a Korean wave phenomenon in the context of globalization, indicating the potential and influence of K-pop worldwide.

2.3 Popular Music as a Culture

Popular music has a particular cultural storage function as it carries culture to next generations. When people hear a popular song, they can judge its age and even feel its unique emotion. Bennett emphasized that popular music can be regarded as a temporal medium because it moves in time (Bennett, 2010). Hence, when music is heard again, it can evoke the structure of time and emotions of past experiences associated with it. In other words, people remember some songs and the experience of listening or sharing music that has an important effect on them. Particularly, the music that people listened to in late adolescence and early adulthood is a crucial stage in identity formation and has important sense for personal later in the life (Dys et al., 2017). Van Dijck explained this phenomenon as individual memory relating to social and cultural backgrounds, when everyone is able to attach their personal feelings and meanings to shared experiences (Van Dijck, 2007). Likewise, Hoeven argued on the relationship between personal memory and cultural practice, and emphasized that popular music memory is used to describe cultural memory related to music (Van der Hoeven, 2014). Popular music, as a cultural form of mass production, has drawn attention of several studies. Schmutz et al., for example, showed that popular music gained cultural legitimacy because it could be discussed almost in any language of high art (Schmutz et al., 2010). Cohen employed an example to illustrate that local fans in Liverpool associated the Beatles with high culture (Cohen, 2013), believing that their creative talent and artistic value should be compared to Shakespeare and Beethoven. Therefore, popular music makes people nurture cultural memory and self-awareness, identity awareness, temporal and spatial awareness (Van der Hoeven, 2014). Since popular music carries cultural memory, its presentation is different in each era and it has the imprint of all times. The emotion expressed by popular music also presents the characteristics of the times. Culture has a significant influence on popular music which is an art with a remarkable form. No matter what form it is expressed, the most basic thing is action's continuation, development, formation, and change. The most important thing in music is to look at the borrowing method of action and the comparison of emotion.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design based on phenomenology, which is appropriate given the focus on explaining the participatory culture in Mandopop of China's millennials from their perspectives. Listening to Mandopop can be regarded as a part of a meaning-making process that involves complex interpersonal interactions and the Chinese cultural system. It is that area of research of popular music which is still developing. Generally, in a phenomenological study, the most common ways to connect with potential participants include referral by other participants, contact with the researcher, or snowballing technique. Sampling has to be in line with the conventional qualitative paradigm, which requires purposeful rather than probabilistic sampling, reflecting the fact that this study seeks insight into a particular experience. Smith et al. stated that participants sampled through purposive sampling "represent a perspective, rather than a population" (Smith, 2007). Moreover, if the sample size is small, it takes a longer time to transcribe and analyze individual cases. It may also be purposefully homogeneous, which means in practice that researchers can seek out individual perceptions of participants, without the need for them to represent a particular group, thereby providing a perspective for subsequent studies. Informants of the current study were sampled through the purposive sampling technique for their specific perspective on the phenomenon being studied, making it easier for people to access the more essential content. The data collection started from August 19, 2022 and ended on July 20, 2023, for a period of 11 months. Each of the ten informants was separately interviewed twice through semi-structured one-on-one interviews, which investigated their daily participation in experiencing Mandopop. Semi-structured interviews allowed them to openly discuss their views and experiences. All interviews were face-to-face or online based on informants' choice and availability. Each interview was 45-60 minutes long for the participant to express their thoughts and stories. When selecting, the researcher had informed all informants about the researcher's discretion to consent or refuse to their participation in the study; they were also informed about the benefits and risks of participating in the study. Additionally, the authors had also sought their consent to use alias, which were provided by each informant. It is also important to note that the informants were reminded prior to each interview of their responsibility to maintain confidentiality and anonymity for clients, peers, and colleagues as they re-told their experiences. Interview questions were tailored to meet research objectives. The qualitative data was thus generated from informants' views on interview questions. A

thematic analysis was carried out of the interview transcripts, which included steps such as conducting detailed line-by-line analysis of informants' views and understandings; identifying potential research themes and underlining commonalities and distinctions; and establishing a frame to illustrate the connections between the themes. The purpose of analysis was to explore each individual's lived experience about a phenomenon produced by the dialogue between the researcher and informants in a particular environment. It requires collaboration between the researcher and each participant to extract an interpretative description from the participant's narration. Table 1 specifically shows an example about the process of theme generation based on the data analysis method. The authors searched for major and recurring codes and tagged them through a careful and repeated reading of the informants' discourses. Subsequently these codes were integrated into a group. The codes were reviewed again and finally the themes were found and generated.

Table 1: An Example of the Process in Analysis, Coding and Theme Generation

Narratives of Informants	Codes	Theme
Da Sheng: ... <u>bring back</u> the songs that may have faded away <u>in the memory</u> ... (p. 3).	Bring Back	It is a Memory of Youth.
Da Sheng: I also like Mayday's songs, give me <u>a kind of youth</u> rock feeling... (p. 3)	Memory	
Da Sheng: ... <u>reliving</u> the most moving melodies of my <u>student days</u> once again, ... but also <u>reminds</u> me of my <u>childhood memories</u> and brings us all together to <u>recapture the youth</u> ... (p. 5)	Youth Reliving	Student Days
Xiang Xi: ... It can be said that Mandopop should be <u>a memory</u> unique to our generation as it <u>grew up</u> with us, especially those days <u>on campus</u> (p. 8).	Remind	
Xiang Xi: ... we can <u>recall</u> those scenes ... It should be a very special but unforgettable <u>memory</u> ... (p. 10)	Childhood	
Zibo: I am keen on commenting and sharing some previous works to take the audience down <u>memory</u> lane (p. 15).	Grew Up	
Grace: ... Mandopop has been with me since I was <u>growing up</u> , it is <u>my youth</u> (p. 21).	On Campus	Reminiscence
Ajun: ... I think I just commented on the feeling of said <u>youth</u> , on this simple word... (p. 29)		
Hukan: ... an expression of self-emotions and <u>memories</u> , ... which is also a kind of <u>reminiscence of the past</u> , my <u>youth</u> (p. 40).		

Given that interviews are the key to the data collection, there are ethical issues that may be encountered throughout the research process. For

example, there may be some topics covered in the interviews that are difficult or unpleasant for informants to address. Before conducting an interview, the informants were informed that they should express and talk about their experiences in a natural and free manner.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Based on the informants' descriptions of their experiences related to participation, the phrase 'participating in' indicates their daily life routine. The informants had real activities or experiences of listening, learning to sing, purchasing or downloading, and sharing Mandopop works. Related themes derived included: 'it is a memory of youth' and 'it is a part in daily life.' The first theme focused on the informants as millennials reviving their past association with contemporary Mandopop. The second theme illustrated how in their daily lives contemporary Mandopop influences their experience and participation.

4.1 "It Is a Memory of Youth"

The influence and distribution of Mandopop among China's millennials is far-reaching and long-lasting. Each participant was exposed to Mandopop since adolescence through radio or television channels. Some informants mentioned in their interviews that Mandopop they had listened to in the past represented their youth and made an impression in their memory. Therefore, past experience of Mandopop is a memory of their youth. It has been imperceptibly integrated into their everyday life since adolescence. All the informants described starting to access contemporary Mandopop when they graduated from primary school or entered junior high school. Da Sheng, the most active informant, recalled his early experiences of listening to Mandopop songs: "[For me], Jay Chou could be regarded as a watershed of Mandopop ... I listened to the songs by Wakin Chau [a Taiwanese singer-songwriter], Andy Lau [one of Hong Kong's Four Heavenly Kings], Yu Quan [a rock duo in Mainland China] before Jay debuted, and Nicholas Tse released his album in 1999 [which] was important to me ... but the appearance of Jay Chou subverted my perception of [popular] music" (August 19, 2022). Each of the informants had a memorable experience of one or more Mandopop songs, but their first experiences of listening to these works were different. Zibo, another informant, said that he started to access Mandopop during secondary school because of a preference for singer-songwriters, and that most of the

songs he listened to were produced by the Taiwan record industry. Taiwanese pop music was an important source of input to the Mandopop market in Mainland China at that time. Mandopop from 20 years ago had to be listened to on cassette tapes or in a record shop. Informants Da Sheng, Zibo and Xiang Xi shared that they purchased their first Mandopop tapes in junior high school, while in primary school Mumu, a female informant, followed her parents in listening to Mandopop songs on tape recorders. After class, informants Cai and Hukan would often patronize record shops where they could experience the songs of different artists. Grace and Shuai, two other enthusiastic informants, watched a TV program called *The Same Song* (see Figure 1) on the Chinese channel CCTV 3 every Friday night. The informant Xiang Xi recalled having started writing lyrics in imitation of Vincent Fang [a Taiwanese lyricist] after hearing his collaborations with Jay Chou, while the informant Zibo always shared his own compositions with his friends. These experiences suggest that China's millennial audience was able to access and experience Mandopop, even if many of them did not regard Mandopop as a distinct genre and knew little about its origins or production.



Figure 1: Program Logo of *The Same Song* Mentioned by Informants (Sound & Vision Panorama, 2023)

Even as the post-2000 contemporary Mandopop market saw the emergence of a large number of singer-songwriters and pop stars. Informants Da Sheng, Xiang Xi, Mumu and Ajun remembered clearly the popularity and topicality of Jay Chou's songs among the millennial generation at that time. Mumu recalled how she grew to be fond of Jay Chou's songs when she was a little girl: "I cannot remember when I first heard Jay Chou's songs ... I was always passive to accept [some music] ... I confessed I did not think it was [songful] when I first heard [the song] Nunchucks... [but] what I did remember was that I once took my mother to listen to [a song] Nocturne... it was probably a summer afternoon, [the

sky] was a little cloudy and about to thunderstorm ... my mother and I listened to it in the study for over two hours ... after that, I began to love his songs” (September 17, 2022). In addition to Mumu’s testimonial, Nunchucks was also mentioned unanimously by three other informants as a rap-based song released in 2001 which blended multiple elements of style (Table 2). Some informants had not encountered the song in the contemporary Mandopop scene and at first instance of listening did not even know what the song was about. In the first interview with the informant Da Sheng, he mentioned that he had made a short video about understanding Nunchucks from his own perspective and posted it on the Douyin platform.

Table 2: Music Analysis Result of the Song “Nunchucks”

Song Title	Key	Stylistic Feature	Main Chords	Acoustics/Synthetic Instrument
Nunchucks	G Minor	Nu mental, Rapping	F5, G5, Bb5	Electric guitar, Drum kit, Bass, Piano, Erhu, Luo

The informant Hukan was never a fan of Jay Chou, nor an avid listener, but he could still describe the characteristics and content of Nunchucks after 20 years. He highlighted the fact that Jay Chou’s songs were being shared among schoolmates and friends, as well as listened to in the high streets and back lanes at that time. At that moment, the so-called ‘Jay-phenomenon’ reached Mainland China from Taiwan, not only influencing the cognition of Mandopop among the millennial audience but also leading to the emergence of, and healthy competition among, more pop artists in the Mandopop industry. The decade between 2000 and 2010, which has been called a peak period of Mandopop, can be seen as a new wave because of the music’s broad dissemination in Asia and among the larger Chinese community. Cai enjoyed listening to Mandopop songs and was a big fan of Taiwanese singer Jolin Tsai, in particular from 2003. He used to buy the local entertainment magazine *Modern Music Field* in order to browse and gather more information and pictures about her (Figure 2). He gave some details about purchasing this kind of magazine: “[The magazine] has a celebrity on the cover [as a cover story] in each issue ... [it] would also have a poster clipped inside ... I remember [this magazine] is semi-monthly and I would look forward to [the contents of] each issue about Jolin Tsai [Taiwanese singer], ... such as her new album, concerts, variety shows, advertising endorsements, and some celebrity talk shows” (August 23, 2022).



Figure 2: Extracts of *Modern Music Field* Collected by Cai, the Participant (Photograph Provided by Cai, 2022)

As the Internet was not yet available in every household, the informant Cai could not obtain the latest news about his favorite singer and Mandopop songs, but this early Chinese popular music publication aimed at providing information to teenagers about Mandopop. As a consequence, Cai started following Jolin Tsai and listened to Mandopop songs for more than 20 years. The informant Grace has also been affected by the development of Mandopop. When talking about whether her experience of contemporary Mandopop was influenced by working in the entertainment corporation now, she said, “Absolutely not, I have been listening to Mandopop songs since I was very young, Mandopop has been with me since I was growing up, it is my youth” (August 21, 2022). She also mentioned that her focus on Mandopop from Taiwan declined slightly at one point because of the reality show *Super Girls* in Mainland China (see Figure 3). Since 2005, reality talent shows for non-professional singers had gradually become an important part of the contemporary Mandopop market (Huang, 2015). Some of the informants mentioned their interest in talent shows during the interviews, as TV was an important medium for popular music at a time when the Internet was not widespread.



Figure 3: Logo of *Super Girls*, a Female Singing Entertainment Talent Show (Baidu Baike, n.d.)

Mandopop has strong roots and a wide audience in China. Taiwan, in particular, has many clever ways of taking part in the production of popular music, including the selection of “artist and repertoire, distribution, promotion, and licensing” (Tsai et al., 2019). This has resulted in well-produced Mandopop songs reaching and being favored by a wide audience in the Chinese community across Asia. Other regions, including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, have therefore followed the Taiwanese model or produced directly in Taiwan when releasing Mandopop songs or debuting singers. The result was an abundant quantity and high quality of Mandopop songs for the millennial audience, who find it easy to choose the pop singer they loved in youth or their favorite Mandopop style. Mandopop songs from the past 20 years have become memories of their youth, especially when listened to again on media platforms, and they recall for the listeners something of how they used to be when they were young. However, they remembered the songs they had listened to and the experiences they associated with Mandopop, and they described profound and pleasant memories of previous Mandopop. Pei, who is a fan of JJ Lin, said, “I don’t think I’m starstruck, but I do feel I’ve more enjoyed Mandopop songs, especially since I was very young” (January 16, 2023). It is clear that the informants have grown up accompanied by contemporary Mandopop. However, during their adolescence, Mandopop produced by Taiwan was one of their choices for enjoying their leisure time in daily life. Some of them had experienced the pirated audio and video products that diffused and disseminated Mandopop throughout Mainland China. Some recounted that when they were in school, they wished they could acquire Mandopop albums directly from Taiwan, but the difficulty of doing so meant that they had to buy pirated copies instead. Clearly, for Da Sheng, Xiang Xi and Zibo, experiencing contemporary Mandopop works has been a major pastime from adolescence to adulthood and even since having a job. Having the time and ability to relisten to songs from the past was a worthwhile experience for them, as contemporary Mandopop was a memory of their youth.

4.2 “It Is a Part in Daily Life”

Some of the informants mentioned that there was a variety of pop song genres available for them to choose from and enjoy, in audio-video shops or on television or radio. In spite of this, all the informants expressed that Mandopop was a mainstream genre of popular music for them and that they listened to it in their daily lives. For instance, Da Sheng noted: “Listening to songs is one of the most favorite things for me to do in my

leisure time ... especially when [I'm] emotionally lost and stressed about study ... [If I] need to relax, then [listening to] Mandopop songs is my first choice ... instead of being there to complain and blame someone or something ... it's one way of releasing stress ... so it's important that Mandopop is a part of my life, because I have got used to listening to some songs which I loved ... it would be a complete impossibility to replace it with anything else" (January 16, 2023). Da Sheng used the music application platforms on his smartphone to download Mandopop songs to listen to on his daily commute. He explained that "I don't usually have a set time to listen to the songs, but I make short videos about Mandopop and post them online in my leisure time". The researcher was shown samples of the videos posted by the informant and also accessed his live stream to connect with him. Da Sheng was passionate about producing videos and writing comments expressing his own opinions about contemporary Mandopop. He shared his understanding of popular music in a Douyin live room daily from 9 pm to 11 pm, even though he had not any background in professional music training. The development of the Internet and digital media enabled the informants to search for Mandopop songs more easily on different platforms, and these activities were integrated into their everyday lives. They employed their own ways to search for, download and listen to their favorite contemporary Mandopop songs. For example, Mumu used her own rules to select songs to experience, "I usually follow the genre lists of songs on music platforms, and look at the rank of the songs [on the home page]. I specially pay attention to the title or the top of the song and if it's good enough, I put it into my song list." She listens to songs late at night while reading comments: "Sometimes I get insomnia, so I turn on my phone and put on the earphone[s] to search for some songs, past or new, and then with that state I go to sleep". When she had a particular feeling about a song, she likes to search for different versions, such as a cover, a concert version or a reality show version. These browsing, searching and listening behaviors are part of her regular activity. Cai used to purchase cassettes and CDs at the local record shop. On his way home after school, he would always stop by the newsstand to look through some of the recently released magazines about Mandopop. Sometimes he would arrive home late because he had found some interesting contents in a magazine: "When I came home by bike, I would unconsciously stop and ask the [newsstand] owner for the latest magazine. Sometimes I would get so caught up [in reading] that I lost track of time, [I was] often rushed home by phone calls from my mom ... and sometimes I would tell the owner to save one for myself in order to

buy it tomorrow” (January 16, 2023). The purchasing of CDs and magazines about Mandopop had become an important part of his daily life, experiencing contemporary Mandopop songs through digital media was still one of his current daily choices today. Nonetheless, during the interviews with the researcher, the informants indicated that they were not obsessive about contemporary Mandopop. For various reasons, they cannot actively listen to Mandopop songs like they did when they were students. As Xiang Xi said, “I listened to the songs using MP3 almost every day when I was at school, but now I can’t. Sometimes I only listen to a few songs when I’m driving, because I’m very busy at work, always overtime to the night ... Of course, if it’s available, I will select to listen to Mandopop songs” (September 9, 2022). Some of the informants, including Da Sheng, stated that listening to the songs was no longer a necessity in their lives, as they have found other ways to connect with contemporary Mandopop: I hope to share my own past experiences to Mandopop with a larger audience, ... and through [the live streaming of] the Douyin platform, I communicate with net friends [every] night ... I also made some short videos about my own understanding of Mandopop songs ... although listening to the songs is a very relaxing thing, for me now, [I] will consider more ways to resonate with contemporary Mandopop” (September 9, 2022). The audience no longer participates in or engages with contemporary Mandopop simply by listening to the songs; they also experience and share Mandopop through digital media platforms during their leisure time. Chinese popular music encompasses numerous sub-genres, and it has an immense market that contains a wide range of audience groups. However, it seems that Mandopop, especially those singers from Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia, are particularly popular with the millennial generation. Experience and consumption on online platforms cover other types of products apart from Mandopop. People make different choices. For Internet users, who have a choice of media platforms and of how to enjoy these resources, using digital media to experience popular music culture can easily be part of daily life, much as people study, work on and experience different things. As with previous ways of listening, such as via an MP3 player or Walkman, songs available online or provided via intelligent push can be experienced at the audience’s convenience. In addition, music content can be enjoyed at any time or in any place using digital media platforms, as long as one has Internet access. As a result, the informants’ ways of experiencing and consuming Mandopop songs have changed since they were first introduced to Mandopop over 20 years ago.

5. DISCUSSION

Participation in daily life represents a kind of physical activity including choosing, listening, sharing or buying through different media. If it were not for the prevalence of piracy in China and the development of media accompanied by the times, China's millennials would not be widely exposed to or easily able to experience Mandopop. The informants' initial exposure and experience of Mandopop began with radio and television programs; songs were later stored in cassette or CD formats; the advent of the Internet brought MP3s and digital music; and in recent years, platformization has become a popular medium for experiencing Mandopop. The change in music storage can make it easier or more convenient for people to experience Mandopop songs in their leisure time. However, short video platforms create a new Internet field of concise, quick, visual and entertaining content (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2022), which offers a colossal of information that crosses boundaries of time and space. The informants' stories and memories about Mandopop reflect how contemporary Mandopop culture influences and permeates their everyday lives. In the process of participation, Mandopop seems to provide the informants with embeddedness and is able to express their lives. The spread of Mandopop in Mainland China was brought about by the official policy of openness and the importing of recording machines and cassettes, especially as regards the permeability of songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan, which brought about a relatively new form of musical culture. China's millennials became the main audience group to acquire these songs. However, audience participation in popular music gradually shifted from passive listening to active selection under the impact of medium change (Hennion, 2001). One factor that cannot be overlooked is that anyone who is exposed to music is exposed to it through a specific medium, be it gramophones, radio, cassettes, VCDs, DVDs [digital versatile discs], CDs with storage capacity, MP3s or mobile phones. In other words, these media have a huge impact on the daily participation in Mandopop of China's millennial audience. Hence, the informants in the study have experienced a transition from passive acceptance of Mandopop's distribution to their own independent choice of songs. Contextually, these findings are consistent with views of Poster, who proposed a division of the media age, starting with the "first media age," which was characterized by traditional media like television, radio, and print (Poster, 2013). It is a broadcast model of communication prevailed. At that time, the distribution of information

was in the hands of a very small number of professionals; the audience received information passively and without interactive communication or daily participation. In the 'second media age,' with the support of technology, a system of producers, sellers and consumers emerged in which the boundaries between the three were no longer entirely clear. This exemplifies the qualities of two-way communication and decentralization. Thus, changes in transformation have led to changes in the state of audience participation in the lived experience of popular music, and millennials have experienced greater changes in medium than other generations. China's millennial audience for contemporary Mandopop attaches importance to the experience and is able to make its own decisions about the types of songs it listens to and consumes through the media. However, Chinese audience that does not have adequate media support may not participate much in listening to Mandopop songs.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals how the informants participated in experiencing contemporary Mandopop in the context of the evolution of media and of how the experience became a memory of their youth and a part of daily life. The data analyzed in this study demonstrate that the millennial audience is closely linked to the development of new media and to market changes in Chinese popular music. Although the number of informants in this study is limited, they are part of the main group who grew up listening to contemporary Mandopop. Frith pointed out that there is a two-way relationship between music and its audience (Frith, 1998). The meaning of popular music is largely a reflection of the dialogue between the musical works and the audience. The informants in this study described how contemporary Mandopop is integrated into the fabric of their daily lives. It is clear that Mandopop serves as an important factor in shaping the audience themselves, as well as in connecting them with others through the medium. It is generally argued that listening to songs and experiencing popular music is a social practice (Bennett, 2012). Although the informants in this study listen to Mandopop songs independently in their daily lives, they also often share their favorite songs with family, friends or users on digital media platforms. People tend to communicate with each other about songs that resonate with them. Some of the informants have also been involved in contemporary Mandopop industry practices. They are keen to project their interest and passion for Mandopop from their youth and past

memories to a wider audience. Their preferred contemporary Mandopop comes not only from Taiwan but also from Mainland China and other regions. Contemporary Mandopop has naturally become an important part of many entertainment cultures. In recent years, the contemporary Mandopop scene has changed according to market demand, and people's experience of popular music has also changed. Listening to music is now overlaid with 'watching' music in the form of short videos plus music, and this has become the mainstream model on media platforms. However, the 'resurrection' of memorable songs on the platform as a kind of media memory will be worthy to further study in the future. The concept of participatory culture has important theoretical implications for understanding audience groups in popular music. Participatory culture refers to a media environment in which individuals actively participate in, produce and share popular music content, rather than being passive consumers. In the context of popular music, participatory culture theory suggests that audiences are no longer merely recipients of music, but active informants in its creation and dissemination. One of the theoretical implications of participatory culture in popular music is the democratization of musical expression. In traditional models of music production and distribution, a small group of industry practitioners, such as record labels and radio stations, hold the power to decide what music reaches the masses. However, in participatory culture, technology and digital platforms have enabled a much wider range of people to participate directly and share music. This has led to a more diverse and inclusive musical landscape where previously neglected and marginalized sounds and genres can be recognized and appreciated. Furthermore, the participatory culture of popular music blurs the boundaries between pop artists and fans. With the advent of social media and short video platforms, pop artists can engage directly with their audiences, fostering a sense of community and collaboration. The audience is empowered to blend, reinterpret and share music, becoming active informants in shaping the cultural discourse around them. This active engagement not only strengthens the relationship between pop artists and fans but also allows for more extensive cultural exchange and interactivity. In participatory culture, the audience is not confined to a passive listening experience. They can participate in activities such as interaction, topic discussion, fan communities and audiovisual editing with their idols, contributing to the entire popular music industry. This active participation adds new layers of meaning and interpretation to popular music, enriching its cultural significance and fostering individual sense-making and identity among the audience. Overall, the application of

participatory culture theory to popular music audiences challenges traditional notions of passive consumption and emphasizes the transformative power of technology and active audience participation. It highlights the importance of recognizing the agency and creative potential of the audience, paving the way for a more inclusive, diverse and collaborative popular music culture. This study has also contributed by employing the phenomenological method to explore the cultural memory in contemporary Mandopop among China's millennials.

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